

Raising Chickens

by Christine Hise, City Floral

As raising chickens in the city is gaining popularity, many of you still have questions about the basics and are probably pondering whether you are ready for the commitment. While building the proper coop and making sure that you have the proper equipment to raise a healthy flock, you can incorporate simple gardening techniques to make the whole experience even more fulfilling. Raising chickens doesn't have to end with building the coop and adding hens.

A garden makes a wonderful chicken habitat if thoughtfully designed. Chickens tend to wreak less havoc in your garden if the plant life is diverse enough. As much as they like to scratch and peck around the yard, they also hide amongst the plant life. If you only have a few plants, they will quickly become bored and destructive. Most urban gardens can accommodate three to five chickens comfortably. You can easily provide shelter for your chickens by planting some Cane Berries, Mahonia, Barberry, Juniper and other thorny or low growing evergreens. Vines, such as grapes, squash, peas and beans also make for great shelter and the chickens usually don't bother with fruit that is out of their reach. They will however, be able to enjoy the stray fruit that drop to the ground.

Fruit trees can be a great addition too. The chickens will not only enjoy picking at the fallen fruit, but will also help clean up any mess left behind. A great selection of greens will also benefit your girls. Any leafy greens, such as Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Plantains and Chard will do. Containing your chickens does not mean putting up giant, chicken wire fencing all around your garden. You can keep them grounded by clipping their wings and save your vegetable garden by planting their own veggie garden, just for them, and surrounding yours with some attractive bamboo or willow fencing.

Choosing your breeds is probably the most fun and most important decision you will have to make. Some tried and true breeds for our Colorado climate include Buff Orpington, Brahma, Rhode Island Red, Araucana, Barred Rock and Wyandot. Not only can they withstand our climate, but they are all great egg layers. I suggest you purchase your chicks locally and ensure that they are lively and alert.

Make sure you are prepared for your new arrivals. You will need a heat lamp, water dish, feeder and brooder, which can be as simple as a cardboard box, as long as it is draft free. Chicks are typically readily available March through May. You should plan on keeping your chicks in either indoors or a warm garage until they are ready for the great outdoors.